

A
LETTER
FROM THE
ASSOCIATED
DISSENTING MINISTERS
OF
CAMBRIDGESHIRE,
RECOMMENDING
A P L A N
FOR THE
FURTHER EXTENSION
OF
THE GOSPEL IN THAT COUNTY:

ADDRESSED TO
THEIR RESPECTIVE CHURCHES,
AND
THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL.

The Poor have the Gospel preached unto them.
JESUS CHRIST.

CAMBRIDGE:
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THE PROFITS OF THIS PUBLICATION WILL BE
APPROPRIATED TO THE CAUSE IT IS INTENDED
TO PROMOTE.

CAMBRIDGE, FEB. 2, 1795.

AT a General Meeting of Protestant Dissenting Ministers in the County of Cambridge, holden at Cambridge, this day, the following Resolutions were unanimously agreed to.

Mr. JOHN AUDLEY IN THE CHAIR.

I. That the Ministers present do form themselves into a COUNTY ASSOCIATION, FOR THE INCREASE OF KNOWLEDGE AND PIETY.

II. That *with peculiar reference to that Object*, they will recommend to their Congregations, the first Monday Evening in every Calendar Month, for a Prayer Meeting.

III. That two Circulating Charity Schools be instituted, subject to future regulations.

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IV. That

IV. That two Itinerant Preachers be appointed, whose labours shall be directed to those parts of the County where they shall be deemed most necessary.

V. That for the above Purposes we will endeavour to procure Annual Collections, which Collections shall be paid into the Hands of a Treasurer, by a Deputy from each Church, on, or before, the General Meeting then following.

VI. That Mr. JOHN AUDLEY, of Cambridge, be appointed Treasurer, and authorised to make any payment; by order of the Chairman at a General Meeting, or at any other period, by order of the Committee, provided such Order be counter-signed by the Secretary.

VII. That the Rev. A. DOUGLAS, of Newmarket, be chosen Secretary.

VIII. That a Committee of seven be appointed; of which number two shall annually go
out

out by lot, and two be elected in their stead by ballot. The Committee to meet every three Months, when four shall be competent to transact business. The Treasurer and Secretary for the Time being to be Members of the Committee.

IX. That should there be a Surplus in the Hands of the Treasurer, after defraying the Whole of the Annual Expences, such surplus shall be given to a Society for sending Missionaries to the Heathen, which Society shall be determined upon by a Majority at a General Meeting.

X. That the Rev. A. DOUGLAS be requested to draw up a Circular Letter, recommending the Object of this Association to the Public, more especially to the Churches in this County.

XI. That the Committee meet at Cambridge, on Monday, the 16th of March, 1795, to fix the Time for the next General Meeting, &c.

XII. That the Ministers present do now subscribe

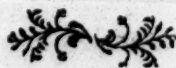
scribe towards the Execution of the above Plan.

XIII. That the Thanks of this Meeting be given to the Chairman.

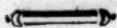
JOHN AUDLEY, Chairman.

A Subscription was then entered into by the Ministers, which amounted to *Nineteen Pounds Ten Shillings*.

N.B. They who are so kind as to encourage this undertaking, are requested to send their Donations to Mr. JOHN AUDLEY, Cambridge; or to ROBERT MAITLAND, Esq. King's-Arms Yard, Coleman-Street, LONDON.



MINUTES.



The Committee met at CAMBRIDGE, March 16,
1795.

The CIRCULAR LETTER was read, approved,
and ordered to be immediately printed.

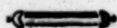
A Correspondence, by Letter, with the WAR-
WICKSHIRE INDEPENDENT ASSOCIATION, was
determined upon.

The next General Meeting was fixed for *Tues-*
day, June the 16th, 1795, at CAMBRIDGE;
—and the Secretary was desired to invite
those Ministers in the County who are not
yet Members of the Association.

Signed by Order of the Committee.

A. DOUGLAS, Secretary.

CIRCULAR LETTER.



Dear Brethren in the LORD:

IN the evangelical system, love to God and man are inseparable: as indifference to either prevails, the evidence of personal religion decreases. Satisfaction and real dignity of character will always be in proportion to your laudable efforts. The motto of the emperor Charles the Vth. is well suited to practical Christians, "Plus ultra," still advance. To promote the kingdom of the Messiah, and the best interest of your fellow creatures formed for eternity, let your exertions be more vigorous and extensive.

Are you not engaged in the best cause? the cause of truth and holiness! What career comparable with that of goodness? Is there any activity so important or noble as living for God? In that great design—that glorious cause—that
 God-

God-like career, the divine word furnishes us with numerous and powerful motives to excite and maintain the most pure zeal. Meditate on these till the heavenly flame becomes ascendant; and particularly dwell upon the boundless love of God your Saviour, that you may be borne on with a divine impulse to every grateful exertion in his service. If there be any thing pleasant in philanthropy, or reasonable in religion—if any thing weighty in divine precepts, or attractive in the bright example of Jesus Christ—if any thing enlivening in the precious promises, or animating in the prospect of the unfading crown—you should be “zealous of good works.” Thus will your advancement in practical religion give lustre to your profession, and “men seeing your good works, glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Brethren, should the force of these obligations be suitably felt, your hearts will be set upon doing good: this object will be kept in view daily, and your inquiries will be similar to those of the pious COTTON MATHER—“What
more

more have I to do for the interest of God in my own heart and life? What shall I do for the churches of the Lord, and the general interest of religion in the world? By what means can I assist in diffusing the favour of the knowledge of Christ, far and wide? Can any further methods be devised that ignorance and wickedness may be chased from people in general."

Are these your inquiries? Permit us to assure you, that by uniting with us in the objects of this address, providence presents you with an opportunity of manifesting the sincerity of your love to God—evidencing your loyalty to the King of Zion, and expressing in the most explicit manner your tender solicitude for the improvement of man. Believing that the united exertions of congregations in this county would prove very useful to the cause of religion, many ministers, met at Cambridge, formed the plan prefixed to this letter (in which, like the primitive Christians, they were of one heart), and now solicit your hearty concurrence with them in this important undertaking. We trust it will

will not be deemed presumptuous to expect general encouragement; lest it should, it may be proper to touch upon the most material parts of the design.

The FIRST respects MEETINGS FOR PRAYER. The epistles addressed to the primitive churches very much recommend this duty. A special union of fervent desires is represented in Holy Writ as certain of success. What instance can be produced of their failure? When, or in what case, were proper petitions rejected? God has promised to be with his servants. He has engaged to exalt his dear son, to enlarge the boundaries of his kingdom, to make truth victorious, and Jerusalem a praise in the whole earth: promises which are intended not only to make known his will, and regulate your requests, but to be the ground of your expectation, and to produce humble boldness when praying for the Prosperity of Zion. "This is the confidence we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." Surround then the throne of grace with united and importunate entreaties, as members of one body, animated
with

with the same spirit of prayer; let the past season of remissness more than suffice. "It is high time to awake;" to be universally in earnest. May your houses of prayer witness the warmth of your spirits, till God shall "rend the heavens and come down," in a shower of blessings upon his church; till mountains of difficulties "flow down at his presence;" the enemies of religion be confounded, the friends of piety exult for joy, numerous accessions be made to Zion in all parts of the habitable globe, and the glory of the latter day dawn upon us, when the seed of Abraham "shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king," the fulness of the gentiles be come in, and every knee bow to the exalted Redeemer. Brethren, it was said of PAULUS ÆMILIUS, an heathen, that, fighting with the Macedonians, he would not give over sacrificing to his god Hercules until he had signs of victory. Let us not be silent "till righteousness go forth from Jerusalem as brightness, and salvation as a lamp that burneth." Remember who hath taught you in a very gracious manner "always to pray,
never

never to faint." Dwell not unduly upon apparent discouragements, but consider what great things Jehovah has done according to his promises, and in answer to prayer. Are not his promises still credible? Is his arm shortened, or less wonderful in working? Does he not still sustain the endearing character "*a God hearing prayer?*" Have we not an advocate whose merit and prevalency are perpetual? "*Ask in his name and you shall receive.* Need we apologize for making this request? No! rather are we bound to urge it. By the absolute dependence of the church upon her God, and by the glorious effects attending her prosperity. Then God appears in his glory, and the Mediator more fully possesses his reward. We may add, that the present state of things calls loudly to this pious exercise. In many *christian societies* what relaxed discipline! what indifference to the peculiar glories of christianity, and the vital power of religion! how few follow God fully! Can we look around our *native land*, and doubt whether they who fear the Lord should meet often for prayer? Does not vice abound in

every town and village? and the number of practical heathen exceed, very far exceed the number of the truly pious? Extend your view to the situation of *Europe*; realize the astonishing revolutions which have taken place; the rapidity with which different scenes have been shifted, and the present shaking of the nations.—All seem to forbode some great changes in the moral world; and not a few suppose they are designed by the UNIVERSAL GOVERNOR to accelerate the milleneal state. Who that fervently desires that period but must feel an heart to pray? Who that prizes the gospel but will be earnest for its free course, glorious race, and complete triumph over antichrist? Who that observes with a pious mind the present circumstances attending nations, but is furnished with much matter for the throne of grace? But wherefore enlarge? Prayer is connatural to a devout mind;—the breath of a soul born from above; and surely one additional hour in a month may be preserved for a prayer meeting? It is not invidious to enquire of the *backward*, whether they are not chargeable with spending many hours to little purpose? or, in unprofitable converse with man?

man? one of which might be happily redeemed to attend upon, and encourage such meetings. That church must be low indeed, which cannot, or will not, maintain a regard to this duty. The first monday evening in every calendar month is recommended, where suitable. We do not mean to dictate, though the more generally the time be observed, the more agreeable. At such a period, the christian may indulge very pleasing reflections upon the nature of the service ; its general success ; and the agreement of numbers, both as to the object, and the time.

CIRCULATING CHARITY SCHOOLS—form another part of the plan*. These are not designed to interfere with *sunday schools*. This part of our plan, the instruction of poor children, has many things to recommend it, exclusive of religious considerations. It merits the encouragement of the advocates for *rational freedom*. “Knowledge is the truest spring of liberty among mankind ;” it preserves from a gross credulity, liable to the worst impositions. The friend of

* By *circulating charity schools* we mean, schools situated in one place and then in another, until it be thought needful to return to the same place again.

human nature, beholding many of his species, like brutes, made merely to carry burthens; or, very little superior to the beast which tills the field, weep over them; his emotions cause him to ask—Can any thing be done among the lower order of human beings, that the rising generation may be taught to think and act as rational creatures? his feeling heart which pities, much pities every one in *total* ignorance, will manifest its benevolence as opportunity offers.

We address you christians, whose pious desires are in unison with our hopes. It is no uncommon thing to hear such say, “our labourers and domestics are honest and sober, but their ignorance is truly lamentable, their oaths shocking, and their aversion to religious exercises public, or domestic, grievous. We desire at *least* a reformation of manners.” Every society hitherto formed for that purpose has found the undertaking arduous, great obstacles there will always be to encounter from the depravity of human nature, and the general countenance of vice among the majority of a nation. How should such considerations operate? Doubtless

less as an incitement to combined efforts in the cause of morality. Will not every rational attempt to check the destructive torrent, or disperse the impending evil, be praise worthy? Do not early instruction and discipline appear very important in this connection? It has been observed in the *general*, "Instruction lays open respective duties to God and society, and presses their compliance on the mind. However obvious they may seem, it is only by instruction they can be conveyed. Human nature is not self-taught, and so indolently stupid is the untutored mind, that without investigation it will neither look for, nor will it find what is so necessary to the common improvement of its character. Man being thus ignorant of his duties; they can have no call upon him, but his passions, headstrong and unopposed, will bear him into vice." This being a descent, he will move on with increasing rapidity, until (without amazing grace) his ruin be complete.

BRETHREN, advert to *particulars*. Time will be redeemed from a fatal indolence. The hours employed under the inspection of a judicious

master wou'd otherwise be spent in fauntering among the profane, or in corrupting each other with vicious devices. The *subordination* of youth will conduce to habitual contentment in their proper rank, and form them for situations of service, and habits of obedience.

By *reading the Scriptures*, an acquaintance will be formed with the precepts of religion, calculated to improve their morals. "Do not those inspired writings *contain* all the principles and rules of virtue and goodness, of diligence and sobriety, of obedience to superiors, justice to their neighbours, truth, faithfulness and love to all men? and when the poor young creatures shall find all these things commanded by the great God, who made them, when they shall read many happy examples of these duties, and the vengeance of God against transgressors, will all this have no influence upon their hearts, to lead them to the practice of virtue? Is it not the most likely way to train them up in all the good qualities of social life, and to guard them
against

against those vile and pernicious practises which abound among the ignorant rabble of mankind, who never enjoyed the blessings of education, nor the benefit of a school, where their manners might be formed to virtue and goodness."

That men be taught to live righteously, soberly and godly in this present world," is the *end* of scripture. But can that end be attained without knowledge? Precious bible! mayest thou never lie uselefs through incapacity to read. Will not the fruits of righteousness be in proportion to the seed of righteousness sown? We admit all increase depends upon the efficiency of Jehovah; however, as God works by an established order, from which deviations are not to be expected, we are led thus to reason upon the subject. Notions will gradually associate with words, and dispositions accord with sentiments, the more conversant is the human mind with the truths of God, the path of duty, and the realities of eternity, the greater will be the probability of suitable effects. The frequent recurrence of those objects not only tend to counteract the influence of such passions as
would

would oppose inward piety and efface serious impressions, but deepen the characters on the fleshly tablet of the heart, and give a strong and prevailing activity to the principles of piety. Thus, *under God*, a reverence for religion will be maintained, and its influence produce good morals. If observation and experience confirm the truth of these remarks on human nature in general, they will apply with additional force to the period of childhood, when habits are not yet formed, and the mind is so peculiarly tender and susceptible. Their knowledge of the scriptures will, moreover, give ministers great advantage in addressing youth.

A due attention to the duties of the SABBATH, is another particular very subservient to reformation. The importance of properly observing the Lord's day, is thus represented by the present bishop of London, "on the due observance of this day, and the appropriation of a large portion of it to sacred purposes, depends, I am convinced, the very existence of religion in this country; scarce one symptom of it ever appeared

appears among us, except on the Lord's day, and when the sanctity of that is gone, every thing is gone with it. We cannot therefore bestow too much time and pains in keeping up to the utmost the spirit of that divine institution; we cannot rescue too much of it from the growing incroachments of worldly business, and worldly pleasure."

In these schools, "the tender thought will be reared, the young idea taught how to shoot, fresh instruction be poured o'er the mind, generous purposes be cherished," and the heart disposed to improvement and order. Should they become universal, and the rising generation among the poor reap all the possible advantages from this institution, who can say how far their beneficial consequences may extend?

All denominations of christians may be provoked to such good works, when we consider the aggregate influence of the lower class, may we hope that the root of national manners being dug about and manured, that of righteousness will be produced which exalteth a nation.

The

The reverse of this presents a melancholy picture. "Men stand prepared for all manner of mischief when they know not how to improve a few leisure moments. Human nature rude and untaught is the more prone to wickedness, at best we can only suppose them to sit whole families, in the long winter evenings, and talk scandal of their neighbours, because their minds were never furnished with better subjects of conversation. They are tempted to fill up their empty hours of life with trifles or follies, or wicked stories, because they were never taught to know better. Facts are not wanting to confirm the above remarks. Every village affords lamentable proof, and the faithful page of history demonstrates the importance of beginning early to cultivate the human mind, while the voice of inspiration thus addresses us, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Since the objects of this charity are unable to plead for themselves, indulge us with your attention while Dr. Watts pleads for them.

"Must

“Must all those children who are so unhappy as to be born of poor or ignorant parents, grow up like the brutes of the earth, without education? Must they be abandoned to the wildness of their own nature, and be let run loose and savage in the streets? Shall no care be taken to inform their minds, and curb their sinful passions? Those that are blessed with a good competence of the things of this life, and have no children of their own, seem invited by providence to take opportunities of doing good to the miserable and distressed orphans, and the children of the poor and needy, who cannot maintain and instruct their own offspring. Those also who feel the tender sensations of parental love to their sons and daughters, and with zeal and delight train them up in useful knowledge, should sympathize a little with those poor unhappy parents, who would fain have their children trained up in piety and virtue, in diligence and duty to God and man; but then, mere poverty withholds them from giving their children the benefit of a school. If you have any desire that the poor of the nation should not
be

be left to grow up in all manner of vice and iniquity, and become a burthen and a nuisance to the kingdom. If you have any value for the preservation of property, for the propagation of virtue and religion, and the transmission of them to the next age; if you have any tenderness for the immortal souls of mankind, and any zeal for the honour of God in the growing generation, bestow a mite towards the support of this most useful and generous charity; give something towards the education of wretched young creatures, that they may be preserved from sin and ruin. If, by the good effects of this slender education, which you bestow upon them, they should ever hereafter grow up to become useful members of civil society, and a blessing to the world, the following age shall thankfully acknowledge your hand in it, and the children themselves shall call you blessed. And above all, if they are by *these means* trained up to the fear of God, to the faith of Christ, and the practice of piety, there will be so many precious souls rescued from the gates of hell, and so many blessed inhabitants added to the heavenly

heavenly regions. What a grateful and surprising pleasure will it be to you, to see such a glorious harvest springing up there from your *grains* of charity scattered here on earth? What an unspeakable joy to *reflect* that you have been the happy instruments of their salvation? And your labour of love shall not be forgotten on the great and solemn day of recompence."

ITINERANT PREACHERS constitute a THIRD part of our plan. Supernumerary preachers of approved ability, may be very serviceable in this county. These are to blow the trumpet, that "those who are ready to perish" in the villages and most obscure parts of the county, may flock to the standard of the cross, and apply by faith to an all-sufficient Saviour.

The sacred historian has recorded of Christ, "He went about the villages teaching." Benevolent example! Influenced by his spirit, some of our brethren have been induced to tread in his steps, and their labours have been attended with pleasure and success. That considerable good has been answered by their exertions; no one acquainted with congregations in the

country can doubt. In this county, churches have arisen from such occasional visits. A barn has been turned into a Bethel; the beauty of the Lord seen, and his power felt; the strong holds of sin have been demolished; towering imaginations thrown down; the kingdom of Satan subverted, and Jesus Christ enthroned in the heart. Many have given themselves up to the Lord, and each other in the bonds of the gospel for edification, and to "increase with the increase of God." Such glorious effects should encourage you to offer assistance in this work. Many in the villages need help;—help for their immortal souls.

Nor is this the condition of our countrymen *alone*; but of the poor benighted heathen. Our heart's desire is, "that they may be saved;" and, for this end, that Missionaries may go forth; men of God with good tidings. On this subject much has been written, to which we refer you*. We hope the minds of men

* Vid. Letters in the Evangelical Magazine for 1794, Horne on Missions.

Periodical accounts of the baptist society, formed for sending out missionaries.

begin

begin to realize the subject, and that exertions will be made suitable to the vastness of the object. Should your liberality enable us to do much in so glorious a work, it will gladden our hearts, and encourage the pious and benevolent constituents of a society formed for that purpose. If your love and pity to the spirits of men be lively, exertions *must* follow. The probability of being useful to *one* soul, should awaken you from supineness. In the conversion of a transgressor, "a soul is saved from death; a multitude of sins covered;" the church of God increased; the kingdom of the Lord Jesus enlarged; the joy of heaven advanced, and a new source opened for eternal admiration and gratitude. Be this the object of your prayer; it deserves your warmest benevolence, and will be your honour.

Beloved, we hope you will feel the *greatness* of our design. Were it to liberate the wretched Africans from a state of slavery, oppression, and misery; or, to open an intercourse with a foreign power profitable to our nation, the huma-

nity, and public spirit of Britons would speedily provide resources. But, our end is vastly more important: It is that the most wretched captives may have deliverance, and the most abject slaves be emancipated; the slaves of lust, the vassals of hell; and that a divine intercourse may be opened between their immortal minds and the heavenly world, an end only to be accomplished "*by the glorious gospel of the blessed God.*" Compared with this, how contracted the sphere of the selfish: how inglorious the idol of the ambitious: how trifling the pursuits of the worldling.

The holy word enforces our requests.—
View christianity as delineated in the book of God: It is described as a *race*; it exhorts us to be *zealously affected always in a good thing*; to be steadfast and immoveable; *always abounding in the work of the Lord*, assured that *our labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

Can we fail to observe from this representation, that criminality attaches itself to lukewarmness; that indifference to the things of
country

God is *opposite* to the religion of Jesus; that the ardor of the soul should be chiefly directed to his service, who having bought you with his precious blood, and sanctified you by his spirit, hath made made you his peculiar people.

Upon the whole, the salvation of man is an object of that magnitude, the improvement of the rising generation of such importance, the extension of the gospel so desirable, and the exercise of prayer so profitable, that we hope to meet with a *readiness* in you to encourage this undertaking. We doubt not but your cheerful contributions will manifest your wish to "lay up treasures in heaven;" treasures whose value and security never change, and afford us the satisfaction of knowing you wish us prosperity in the name of the Lord.

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